

SIDELIGHTS ON THE WAR

CARDINAL MERCIER LAUDS NATION'S
MORAL GRANDEUR.

A glowing tribute to the courage and devotion of the Belgian people in their fight for liberty is paid by Cardinal Mercier, the Primate of Belgium, in his Lenten Pastoral letter, dispatches from London state. Under the heading, "The Moral Grandeur of the Nation," Cardinal Mercier says:

"My beloved brethren, is it indeed necessary to preach courage to you? And when I say 'you,' I am thinking more immediately of the faithful companions of our misfortunes, but my thoughts go out also beyond our occupied provinces to our refugees, our prisoners, our deported fellow-countrymen and our soldiers. . . .

"In our young days our professors of history rightly held up to our admiration Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans, who, instead of seeking safety in easy flight, allowed themselves to be crushed by the Persian army at the Pass of Thermopylae. . . . The teachers of the Belgian generation of to-morrow will have yet other instances of military heroism and patriotism to evoke. And may we not hope that our generation, too, will preserve the memory of the union it now has fashioned, and that in the future there will be among us all a deeper wish for national union, less personal acrimony in the conflict of ideas, less grudging responsibility for civil and religious authority, more general fidelity both before public opinion and in the secret recesses of the soul, to our motto 'Union is strength,' an echo of the words of Christ's that they may be one."

The Pastoral suspends the double precept of fasting and abstinence throughout Lent except on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It advises all who can, however, to fast and abstain Wednesdays and Fridays throughout Lent. The eating of fish and meat at the same meal is prohibited except for soldiers.

GENERAL NIVELLE: HERO OF THE SUPREME
MILITARY TRIUMPH OF THE WAR.

Few personalities have been subjected to so keen a scrutiny by the press of Europe as that to which Nivelle, the hero of Verdun, has been subjected. The great war found him an obscure colonel in the artillery, and he is now the most famous of the "great" commanders. In France the features of Nivelle confront everyone in busts, in photographs, in line drawings. The blaze of all this glory reflects, as the *Gaulois* observes, the flame of Verdun, where Nivelle said of the Germans: "They shall not pass!" and made good his word.

Like all the French soldiers who have emerged to renown and high command, Nivelle is nearing his sixtieth year. He is not racially French at all, despite his birth at Tulle in the very Gallic department of Correze. His mother was an English woman, Louisa Theodora Sparrow-Pennington, of Deal, whose father and grandfather fought on land and sea for the British kings. Her father fought under Wellington and her grandfather fell in one of our own colonial wars, having been present at the defeat of Braddock. General Nivelle, according to the *London Post*, has also a link with the literary world, as Elizabeth Carter, the contemporary and friend of Doctor Johnson, was his grand-aunt. On the north side of St. Clement Dane's church in the Strand is a window placed there by the late rector in memory of General Nivelle's mother, and thither the Londoners are now flocking to inspect the baptismal register where the name of the grandmother of the hero of Verdun is inscribed.

Meanwhile the Italians vie with the English in claiming Nivelle for their own. His grandfather was a soldier of the first empire, being made an officer and decorated with Napoleon's own hand. During the Corsican's Italian campaign, the grandfather of Nivelle fell madly in love with an exquisite young girl in Naples. They were married and their first son fell in love with that young lady in Deal.

Thus is explained, notes the *Paris Liberte*, that combination of traits which affords a key to the display of genius at Verdun. His coolness, his reserve, his reluctance to be bound by a cut-and-dried "plan" of campaign, his spirit of adventure, these traits are derived from that young lady of Deal, who brought him up with severity and taught him to speak English. She also saw to it that he avoided the habit of smoking and acquired the practice of bathing in cold water. From her, too, he derives his large gray eyes. The regularity of his features, the fertility of his intellect, in "conceptions" and the swiftness with which he devises expedients, these, the French paper admits, are Italian. He has likewise the Italian facility in conveying intimations and orders with a mere gesture.

All the technical training of Nivelle has been in the artillery and he was educated at the famous "Polytechnique," where, as a young man, according to the character sketches in the French press, he manifested his mathematical mind, his reserve, his incapacity to mingle on terms of ordinary comradeship with the men about him. A certain slowness of perception in regard to the theoretical side of his arm of the service made him the butt of his brethren of the corps, who facetiously ascribed this mental awkwardness to his British blood. "Ah, Nivelle sees!" became a class joke, followed by the chorus: "At last!" The jest followed him to Algeria, where his practical experience as an artillery officer was chiefly gained. Nivelle imbibed at this period a contempt for the theorising of the bookish pedants in his profession which he still reveals. "Theory?" he cried impatiently to the newspaper correspondents after Verdun: "I've got no theory." He felt miserably again, according to the sketch in the *Manchester Guardian*, for he was reminded of the mockery he had to endure back in the days of the Polytechnique. All he knows about military science, according to himself, is to fight.

One of the anecdotes illustrating the Nivelle temperament characteristically has to do with the agony of the retreat to the Marne. The great captain of France was then but a regimental commander, in charge of the pieces of artillery moving painfully away from the advancing Germans. The French rank and file could make nothing of these manoeuvres. The strategical conception underlying the whole movement was a secret at headquarters. The fury of the retreating French as they fled, fled, fled before the invader vented itself upon the commanders in their vicinity, taking the form of hisses, catcalls, whistles. Nivelle had his full share of these. All a September day he marched afoot stolidly, his hand upon a piece of artillery, ignoring a display of this spirit of insubordination. He did not even enter a complaint. When the offensive was renewed the whole regiment under his command roared out his name in wild enthusiasm. The General ignored the applause as completely as he had overlooked the hisses; but the story had preceded him to Verdun and accounted for the devotion of the men there who rushed into living flame when he said simply: "They shall not pass." "Ils ne passeront pas!" became the watchword at Verdun.

Nivelle is credited with a melancholy disposition by the writers who seem closest to him. Whether it be due to domestic sorrows, to a career that allowed him to stagnate in the African deserts and Algerian wilds until his hair turned gray, or to the accidents of his birth and training, Nivelle is said to avoid society in general and to prefer the company of a few army friends. One of his relaxations is a game of piquet or vingt-et-un. He is not witty like the clever Foch, nor is he jovial after the fashion of Joffre, and he has never enjoyed the robust health of Sarrail. His reluctance to unbosom himself, to display his character in human terms, is ascribed to the solitude of his Algerian life. There is an Orientalism of attitude which strikes the French journalists as unusual even in one who has mingled much with Mohammedans. His fatalism may explain the reckless disregard of his own life against which some of his staff are already protesting.

Nivelle, observes the *Illustration*, regards the